

A CHRISTOLOGICAL TREATISE ATTRIBUTED TO THE FATIMID CALIPH AL-MUIZZ

When writing the notice for Arabic manuscript 131 of the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris, my attention was drawn to the presence, in this manuscript of Coptic origin, of a small Christological treatise entitled *Faṣī min al-Magāla al-Masihiyya*, inserted between the Apocalypse of Samuel de Qalamoun and a collection of eleven miracles of S. Michel (1),

Consulting the repertoire of C. Brockelmann (2) taught me that this treatise, attributed by superscription to the Fatimid Caliph al-Mu'izz (3), had been published by Louis Massignon in his Collection of unpublished texts (4). Indeed, among the "related" texts of theologians, Massignon gave some extracts from this *Maqala* which, according to him, may be authentic.

Now a few years later, while studying the *Kitāb al-Hudā*, the theological-canonical collection of the Maronites, I realized that most of the elements of the *Maqala masihiyya* were found in the 28th chapter of this heterogeneous compilation, formerly published by Pierre Fahed (5)

This 28th chapter of *Kitab al-Huda* (6), which does not bear a title, unlike the other chapters, is made up of two very distinct parts, in the form of epistles:

the first part (p. 235-240), which explains the reasons why the Creator manifested himself to men in the person of a human being, Christ;¹

- the second part (p. 240-243), which contains a certain number of answers to questions relating to Christ, asked of different characters.

Apparently, we find ourselves in the presence of two reviews of the same treatise: a short, abbreviated review, of Coptic origin, contained in Arabic manuscript 131 of the National Library, and a long, more developed review, of Syriac origin, contained in three manuscripts of the *Kitab al-Huda*, including Syriac manuscript 223 from the National Library².

With the help of the information provided by the superscriptions of the two recensions, let us first examine the conditions in which this treaty has reached us.

Here is what the superscription of the Coptic recension says (Arabic ms. 131, fol. 87 v°,

1. 2-10):

الا سدقف ب خطك تاب من ن قل مما ب مصر الخ ل ي فة المعز الامام ت ال يف المس يدية المقالة من ف صل
جع فر وك ت به العالمين رب لله الحمد الك تاب ت م اخرها ن نسخة من ب الدم ياطى المعروف ب ولس

(1) On this 15th century manuscript, cf. G. Troupeau, *Catalog of Arab monuscripts*, vol. I, Paris 1972, p. 94.

GAL, Suppl., I, 324.

(On this fourth Fatimid caliph, conqueror of Egypt and founder of Cairo, cf. FI, III, 754-756.

(4) L. Massignon, *Collection of unpublished texts concerning the history of Muslim mysticism*, Paris 1929, p. 215-217.

(5) P. Fahed, *Kitab al-Huda or Book of Direction*, Aleppo 1935.

In P. Fahed's edition, this chapter occupies pages 235-243.

(1) On this 16th century manuscript, cf. H. Zotenberg, *Catalogue des manuscrits syriaques*, Paris 1874, p. 168-171.

الفوارس ابوالشيخ اخبرنا واوله وثلثمائة وثمانون سنة الاخرة جمادى في بخطه عامر بن محمد بن

عنه الله رضى الداعي القاضي الحداد بي احمد بن محمد رواه قال المهدى محمد بن الحسن بن

<<< Section of the Christological Treatise composed by Imam al-Mu'izz, the Caliph of Egypt, which is transcribed from the book written by the hand of Bishop Paul, known under the name of al-Dimyāṭi, d 'after a copy whose explanation is: "The book is finished, praise be to God, Master of the Worlds! Ga'far ibn Muhammad ibn 'Amir wrote it in his own hand, in the last month of Ġumādā in the year 308", and the incipit is: "The šayh Abū l-Fawāris al-Husayn ibn Muhammad al-Mahdi reported to us that Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Halabi al-Qādi al-Dāi may God be pleased with him! passed it on."

As for the superscription of the Syriac recension, here is the content (ms. Syriac 223, fol. 107 v°, col. a):

من نقلها انه ذكر الكاتب ان (؟) عداد بن ابان المعروف براهيم بن (؟) الجواء يدنو نسخة من نقل ما هذا
الفوارس ابوالشيخ اخبرنا واوله وثلثمائة وثمانون سنة الاخرة جمادى في مورخا وجدده نسخة
المعز مولانا عن الله رضى الداعي القاضي الحداد بي احمد بن علي رواه المهدى محمد بن الحسن
اجمعين عليهم الله صلوات ابائهم عن المومنين ميراثه تعالى الله لدين

This is transcribed from the copy of Jawa'id (?) ibn Ibrahim, known as Ibn 'Idad (?); the scribe mentions that he transcribed it from a copy he found, dated to the first month of Jumādā of the year 386; the sayh Abū l-Fawāris al-Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Mahdi reported to us that Ali ibn Ahmad al-Halabi al-Qadi al-Dai - may God be pleased with him! transmitted it from our lord al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah, the Prince of the believers, from his fathers; May the prayers of God be upon them all!"

Alongside common elements, these two superscriptions present notable differences, which make it difficult to reconcile the data they provide.

The first difference concerns the date of the copy to which the two reviews date back. The date provided by the Coptic superscription is clearly erroneous, since the caliph al-Mu'izz, born in 319/931, reigned from 342/953 to 365/975. This is the reason why Massignon proposed to correct 308 in 358. And for the date of the Coptic recension to coincide with that of the Syriac superscription, it would be necessary for the scribe to have confused tamānīna with tamānin, to have omitted sitta and that he read 'ahira instead of 'ulā.

The second difference relates to the names of the reporter and the transmitter: al-Husayn and Muhammad in the Coptic superscription; al-Hasan and Ali in the Syriac subscription. The very common nature of these names and the variations they present make it difficult, if not impossible, to identify the characters they designate.

Let us now examine in what state the Maqāla Masihiyya has been preserved for us in the two recensions:

The Coptic recension appears to us to be very incomplete, since it is made up of six fragments which, in P. Fahed's edition, represent only a tiny part of the Syriac recension: 19 lines out of the 73 lines in the first part, 2 lines out of the 54 lines in the second part.

On the other hand, the Coptic recension contains a fragment which does not appear in the Syriac recension, which proves that this recension, too, is not complete.

Through the two recensions, the text of the Maqāla has reached us in a very poor state. This is explained by its esoteric character, which made it almost incomprehensible to Christian scribes. Unaccustomed to copying treatises of this kind, they transmitted it to us disfigured by numerous reading errors, in particular the copyists of the Syriac recension, written in Karšūni (1).

Neither review, taken separately, offers a satisfactory text. However, it seemed possible to us to improve the text of the Coptic recension using the Syriac recension, which makes it possible, in particular, to fill four gaps between paragraphs of the Coptic recension.

We will find, below, the Arabic text of part of the Magāla Masihiyya, edited from the Arabic manuscripts 131 and Syriac 223 of the National Library, and an attempt at a French translation.

In conclusion, this Christological treatise should be compared to two other philosophical-theological writings attributed to the caliph al-Mu'izz, and to which it is related: an untitled treatise on the Ismaili doctrine, and an interview (munāḡāt) with Dieu, which were published and translated by Stanislas Guyard³,

But the presence of a treatise on Ismaili Christology in Christian manuscripts is quite surprising. If the presence of this treatise in a Coptic manuscript is not inexplicable, due to the fact that the Fatimid dynasty reigned in Egypt until the end of the 12th century, it is more difficult to explain in the Syriac manuscripts of a Nomocanon maronite.

Did this treaty come from Egypt to Lebanon via a manuscript containing a Coptic Nomocanon, used by the compiler of the Kitab al-Hudā, or did it reach this compiler through local Ismaili circles?

It would be interesting to be able to answer this question, because the answer provided would probably help to resolve certain difficult problems posed by the composition of Kitāb al-Huda

(1) On this term, which designates Arabic written using the letters of the Syriac alphabet, cf. G. Troupeau, EI, IV, 699.

(S. Guyard, Fragments relating to the doctrine of the Ishmaelis", in Notices and extracts from the manuscripts of the National Library, vol. XXII, Paris 1874, p. 217-229 (text) and p. 328-358 (translation).

(1) On these problems, cf. Antoine Jubeir, Kitab al-Huda, Essay, Jounich 1974.

19) In the critical apparatus, the Arabic manuscript 131 is designated by the letter 3, and the Syriac manuscript 223 is designated by the letter

TRANSLATION

Section of the Christological Treatise composed by Imam al-Mu'izz, the Caliph of Egypt.

بمصر الخليفة المعز الإمام تاليف المسديدية المقالة من فـ صل

(1) If the Creator His power is majestic! had manifested itself to as He manifested Himself to the prophet Moses, peace be upon him! through the thorn bush, under the appearance of fire⁴, no one could have heard His word, nor seen His person; a little of His power having attached itself to the prophet Moses, when He appeared to him on the mountain, when he came down to the children of Israel, he veiled his face, so that the children of Israel could see him and speak to him (3), while he was a human being, like them; how would it have happened if it had been the opposite of that?

(2) Voluntarily, the Creator made it possible to manifest Himself, by means of the bodily form, of the Adamic, human body, out of affability for His creatures, out of mercy for them, and out of pity; whereas He knew that it was not in their capacity to bear Him; for if He had manifested Himself to them, without conforming to them, they would not have been able to approach Him, nor establish the majesty of the Word; for if He had manifested Himself to them, by means of the perfection of His divine luminosity, His light would have extinguished all other light, and it would have made everything on the face of the earth disappear, and this would not have been admitted according to wisdom, nor firm according to righteousness; are in the sense of union and separation; He manifested Himself by means of the visible form, to establish His evident and certain existence, for whatever the name of manifestation does not apply to, almost does not exist. because it is from the Lord, the Ancient, Christ is united with Him and not separated from Him, distant from Him and not close to Him; but it comes from Him, in the sense of the universal part; we say by united with Him and not separated from Him, that he is identical with Him, and by distant from Him and not close to Him, that he is other than Him; like the disk of the sun, the rays and the shadow, the three the disk, the rays and the shadow,

(3). We say of this visible form, by means of which He manifested Himself to creatures, that He is this form firmly, spatially and concretely; and that this form is not Him by gathering or grouping, counting or embracing, and I take an example on this subject, as when we say: like the mirage of stagnant water, he who is altered takes it for 'water, until he arrives there, and finds that it is nothing, whereas he had found it according to him, and which his estimate had obtained for him.

(4). The Holy Spirit exists in this form; he is not exempt from it, and he is not restricted to it; but he is worthy of her and superior to her; in the manner of knowledge, and not in the manner of mixture; the creatures looked at Him from the point of view of their conformity, like one who looks in the mirror: he looks at himself, and he appears to his eyes in intimacy and affinity; by names and attributes He hid Himself by means of man; and He manifested the eating of food

(1) On the different meanings of the word "alam, cf. G. Troupeau, in *La knowledge du monde dans l'Islamclassique*, Paris 1973, p. 71-72.

Allusion to the episode of the Burning Bush, on Mount Horeb, reported in Exodus in chapter III, verses 2-4.

(3) Allusion to the episode of the dictation of the tables of the Testimony on Mount Sinai, reported in Exodus in chapter XXXIV, verses 29-35.

and the absorption of drink, with regard to men, in order to thereby draw near to their hearts and minds; for if He had manifested Himself to them, in respect of His divinity, they could not have seen Him;

(5) but He manifested Himself to them by means of bodily stature, by which He became in affinity and intimacy with men, in order to establish proof towards His creatures, by Himself; It is hidden in manifestation, manifest in occultation, hidden by that which is manifest, manifest by that which is hidden.

(6) He was called of Himself, by Himself, to Himself; we say that it was called from the universal soul, by the true and divine soul, to the particular soul; outwardly He is a prophet and an apostle; internally, He is an elusive mystery; He is the Holy Spirit, and He is the eternal divinity, and the subject of His attributes, by which He Himself is qualified: He is hearing and seeing, knowing and wise.

(7) For the First, the Eternal, the definition does not apply to Him, nor the attributes; He is not ranked under qualities, and neither end nor quiddity is known to Him; Its division is not feasible, and It is not countable; the One was created to be the principle of numbers; Don't you see that if you say a thousand and a hundred thousand, you must necessarily return to the one, which is their beginning.

(8) He is the perfection of wisdom, which does not cease to abide with Him; and the man to whom He is united is Christ; Christ is unique, coming from a unique one; He came down from heaven and ascended there; He is the Lord of the Worlds; Praise be to Him, and hallowed be His names, from the beginning, now, and forever.

(9) One of the saints said: He is the perfect divinity, who has arisen in perfect humanity; and His occurrence in humanity did not occur in the manner of mixture, nor of proximity, nor of conformity.

(10) For if He had mixed, and had become neighbor or conformable, that which did not come from Him would have been destroyed; but He has chosen, from His essence, names and attributes, by which He has drawn near to His creatures, out of kindness, on His part, towards them, and to establish justice over them.